

Perry, T. A. *God's Twilight Zone: Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008. xxi + 208 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

T. A. Perry's iconoclastic *tour de force* attempts to explore a biblical zone of obscurity in order to design a new and much more pervasive wisdom than the one familiar to most Hebrew Bible students. It is a wisdom that begins at the beginning, with three chapters and ten different discussions based on Genesis. That book is evidently, for Perry, definitive of biblical wisdom. The author has accorded it much honor in the present treatise for it occupies the introductory position, is the focus of three chapters—a third of the book's nine, and spans more than a quarter of the book's analysis and commentary. Perry's principal focus is the term *tsaddik*, attributed to Noah in Gen 6:9. The term is common in biblical wisdom literature with that more than a quarter of all its Hebrew Bible uses found in three Solomonic sections of Proverbs. For Perry, the term refers, more than anything else, to the one who is for life, for preservation of seed, and for facilitating the blessing of Gen 1:28 that ensures humanity's fruitfulness, multiplication, and replenishing of the earth.

Following treatments of Noah, Tamar, and Pharaoh in Genesis, Perry progresses to Samson, whose proclivity for riddles suggests to our author "an evolutionary model for the origins of wisdom itself" (xix). With Francis Landy (*Semeia* 32 [1984]:131-48), Perry sees Samson as a "border" figure communicating between Philistine and Israelite worlds, consumed, at last, by that marginality. Perry puts this characterization to good use in developing his "twilight zone" metaphor as he emphasizes both the ambivalence that is and that engenders biblical wisdom as well as the pervasiveness of the phenomenon.

The book's fifth chapter, on Saul, emphasizes the first king's personal insecurities, while at the same time expanding "the dimensions of [his] importance" (89) and showing how three verses in 1 Samuel [10:11, 12; 19:24] provide the paradigm of proverb formation. Solomon, the subject of chapter 6, brings readers to the more familiar wisdom territory, where they continue through to the end, with three final chapters on Ps 1, Qoh 12:1-8, and Prov 30:18-20. The book is rounded out with a brief excursus ("Righteousness in the *Ethics of the Fathers*") whose final note reiterates what Perry argues in chapter 7, viz., that "God's and Israel's righteousness is of one kind and continuous" (182). Supplementary materials include two pages of abbreviations of sources, a preface, and seven pages of introduction, as well as twenty-six pages of bibliography, indices of names and subjects, ancient sources, and Hebrew words.

Perry's stimulating study may be well informed by the rabbinical material, but it is surely no place of convention. Perry's learning permits him, conceptually and methodologically, to be his own character, as idiosyncratic as his Saul or Samson. Conceptually, his understanding of wisdom allows for a range of champions including Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Judah, Tamar, and Joseph. It is a range clearly beyond the scholarly consensus that now excludes such characters as Joseph and Esther, finding that their inclusion requires "too loose" a use of terms (Michael Fox, *Proverbs*, Anchor Bible, 2000, 17,

n. 25). Methodologically, some may find that he has inverted the process of arriving at his conclusions, working with a preferred definition rather than extracting it from the wisdom texts before making his global application.

Inversion and topsy-turvy are, of course, Perry's stock in trade: his King Saul must be more important than has usually been granted; his Pharaoh's worries about Israel (Exod 1:10) are not primarily in military terms but rather in agricultural and productive ones (49); his proverbs are not timeless wisdom (90)—though one wonders now if they must then be timeless trivia or folly, for they are surely timeless; his Qoh 12 is neither allegory nor altogether literal; and his Tamar becomes the crowning simile of righteousness: Ps 92:12 should be translated "The righteous shall flourish like Tamar," *tamar* being both the proper name and the term for "palm tree." Enthusiasm for Tamar seems to specifically name her as more righteous than even Noah. This last may either be inadvertent or intentional. Only our text can tell, whose table of contents lists "Noah the Tsaddik," followed immediately by "Tamar the Greater Tsaddik." Tamar is, of course, by Judah's admission, more righteous than he (Gen 38:26). But Perry's definitions may allow incest and that which Habakkuk curses to be deemed "righteous" even if only "in a compromised way" (39), because Lot's daughters succeed in preserving seed by intoxicating their father (see Hab 2:15). Clearly much compromise is involved in Perry's radical definitions.

Characterization of Saul as modest, not knowing power, having no taste for it, loving his enemy David, is equally dubious (89), given the conceit and disobedience of 1 Sam 15, the slaughter of priests in 1 Sam 22, the arrogant insensitivity of 1 Sam 14:24-45, and the ruthless attacks on and pursuit of David (1 Sam 18:6-19:24). Nor is Saul's story in any way a narrative of "rags to riches." Saul's deferential attitude before Samuel and the crowd assembled to choose a king should not be confused with notions of poverty. Saul was not poor (1 Sam 9:1-3).

In the end, though, because he is both learned and independent, Perry's work provides a noteworthy example of constant dialogue with the biblical text, the sources of Jewish tradition, and the world of contributors to biblical scholarship. He is neither merely reflecting the views of others, nor repeating well-known traditions. Neither is he necessarily affirming established scholarly consensus. Those who find it fascinating to follow a brilliant mind at work will experience a great thrill even if they stumble a bit in Perry's twilight zone.

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LAEL CAESAR

Schneider, Tammi J. *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 240 pp. Paper, \$21.99.

Most of the women in the book of Genesis are known by stigmatizing labels: Sarah as mean in regard to Hagar; Potiphar's wife being marked as a liar. But are these legitimate representations?

Tammi Schneider's purpose is to show that "women's roles in the narrative are more than just footnotes to the men" (10). Schneider, who is Professor